



MASARYK UNIVERSITY

Hidden Bias in the Discourse of American Presidential Candidates

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Outline

1. Hidden bias as a form of doublespeak
2. Presidential Debates
3. Example of the use of hidden bias
4. Results of the analysis

Doublespeak

- Doublespeak - language that pretends to communicate but really doesn't. It is language that makes the bad seem good, the negative appear positive, the unpleasant appear attractive or at least tolerable. Doublespeak is language that avoids or shifts responsibility, language that is at variance with its real or purported meaning. It is language which conceals or prevents thought; rather than extending thought, doublespeak limits it (Lutz 1990:1)
- Hidden bias – positive or negative

Hidden Bias

- Words can imply a positive or a negative attitude and evaluate reality in a particular way, and thus manipulate people's perception of reality (Bolinger 1980:76)
- Adjectives, nouns, and verbs
- Other forms of doublespeak:
 - Purr and snarl words
 - Euphemisms

Bias in Adjectives

- Most prone to hidden bias
- Each adjective represents some quality, but this quality is not always the same
- There can be 'more' or 'less' of it and thus it can be perceived as 'better' or 'worse'.
- *Young (handsome, attractive, inexperienced)*
- *Brave (strong, courageous)*
- *New (different, modern)*
- *Extreme (absurd, dangerous)*

Bias in Nouns

- Less prone to hidden bias than adjectives
- When used in a function which resembles adjectives, i.e. they can still be compared for degree
- Associative meaning can be inferred from collocations which most often go with the noun
- *Reformer (progressive, efficient)*
- *Dictator (brutal, ruthless, cruel)*

Bias in Verbs

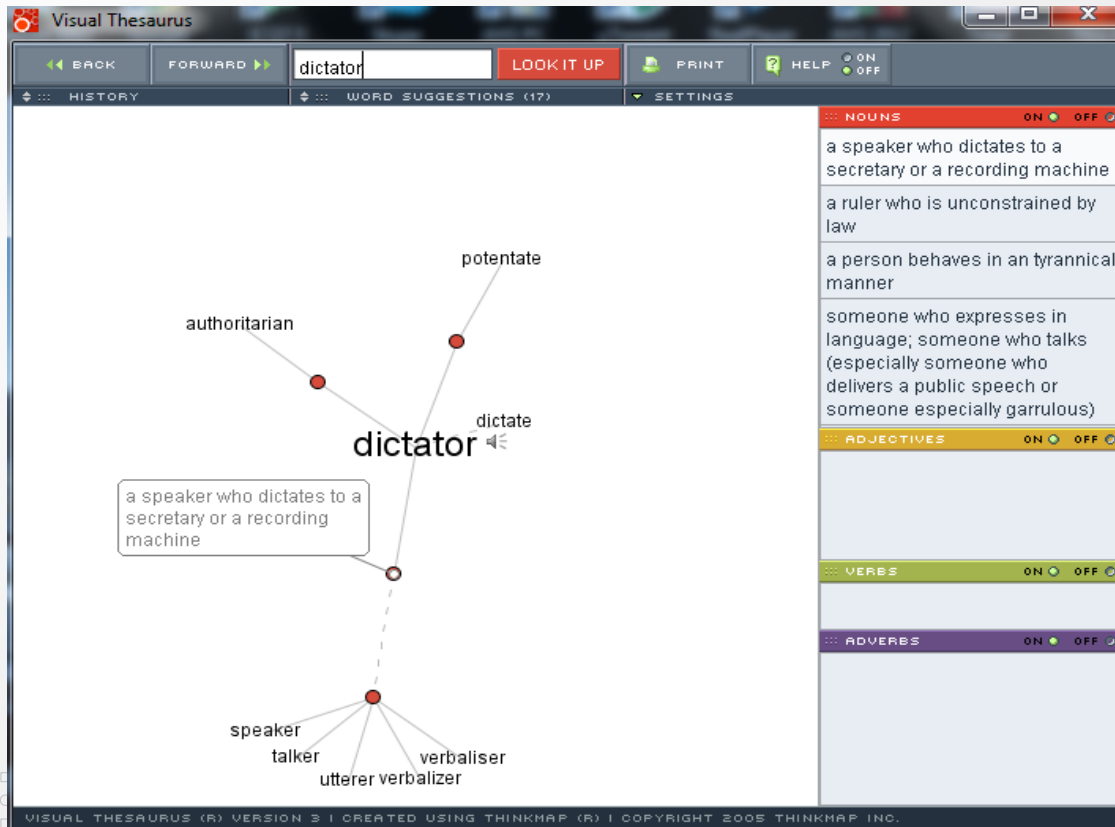
- Even less prone to bias than adjectives and nouns
- Actions which are automatically viewed as positive or negative
- The bias consists of the speaker's description of a fact as good or bad
- *Succeed x fail*
- *Win x lose*
- *Build x destroy*

Analysis – Corpus and Aims

- Televised presidential debates before American presidential elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008
- Development of the use of hidden bias from 2000 to 2008
- Comparison of Democratic and Republican candidates

Method of Analysis – Denotative Meaning

Thinkmap Visual Thesaurus



Method of Analysis - Connotative meaning

- The best way to find out the connotations of a word is by employing a large corpus
- The associations and connotations a word has are shown by characteristic collocations which occur with the word (Stubbs 1996:172)
- Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA)
- Largest currently available corpus of American English - more than 450 million words (1990 – 2012)

COCA

Firefox | Corpus of Contemporary American Engl... | corpus.byu.edu/coca/

fb YouTube Aktuálně idnes novinky rovnost is Radia KB Mapy COCA DeliCast Torrents citace Dict Fmail archiweb gmail Záložky

CORPUS OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN ENGLISH

450 MILLION WORDS, 1990-2012

ACCESS: 1/5

START COMPARE history | lists | profile | logout

DISPLAY

LIST CHART KWIC COMPARE

SEARCH STRING

WORD(S) dictator

COLLOCATES [j*] 4 4

POS LIST adj.ALL

RANDOM SEARCH RESET

SECTIONS SHOW

1 IGNORE 2 IGNORE

SPOKEN FICTION MAGAZINE NEWSPAPER ACADEMIC

SORTING AND LIMITS

SORTING FREQUENCY

MINIMUM FREQUENCY 10

CLICK TO SEE OPTIONS

SEE CONTEXT: CLICK ON WORD OR SELECT WORDS + [CONTEXT] [HELP...]

COMPARE ? SIDE BY SIDE

		CONTEXT	ALL
1		IRAQI	153
2		BRUTAL	63
3		MILITARY	53
4		COMMUNIST	44
5		SOVIET	39
6		LATE	32
7		RUTHLESS	31
8		DEPOSED	26

KEYWORD IN CONTEXT DISPLAY

Help / information / contact

SECTION: NO LIMITS

CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT [?] SAVE LIST CHOOSE LIST CREATE NEW LIST [?]

1	2012	SPOK	ABC_ThisWeek	A B C	, Mr Assad has turned out to be just like his daddy, a brutal dictator . Kofi Annan has it absolutely right. The Arab League and oth
2	2012	ACAD	ForeignAffairs	A B C	always a strategic sideshow. Obama helped achieve the relatively low-cost overthrow of a brutal dictator there, supporting the n
3	2011	SPOK	Fox_Five	A B C	hasn't been in the news much except for the brutal murder of their brutal dictator on camera for everyone to see. And the deb
4	2011	MAG	Newsweek	A B C	the tiny oil-rich African nation of Equatorial Guinea and son of the country's brutal dictator . The 41-year-old Teodoro has made t
5	2011	NEWS	AssocPress	A B C	. " He would have us ignore all of the warning signs of another brutal dictator who wants to wipe Israel off the face of the Earth.
6	2011	NEWS	CSMonitor	A B C	his home county as a freedom fighter who saved his people from the then brutal dictator President Doe. # Samuel Dahn, a fore
7	2010	MAG	Atlantic	A B C	European soldiers lost their lives in the cause of that intervention, which overthrew a dictator , undid a brutal police state, and int
8	2010	NEWS	CSMonitor	A B C	the sake of a military base in a country, our leaders accept a brutal dictator who oppresses his population. This may be conveni
9	2009	MAG	WallStreet	A B C	... He was born in 1955, 300 years before Francis Drake's United States' first dictator for nearly 4 years took power. His father

2008 Facebook - M... Corpus of Con... Analysis descri... Hidden Bias in... Doublespeak i... Anglicko-česk... CS 20:18 20.9.2012

Exapmle of the Use of Hidden Bias

➡ In Iraq, no doubt about it, it's tough. It's **hard** work. It's incredibly **hard**. You know why? Because an **enemy** realizes the stakes. The **enemy** understands a **free** Iraq will be a major **defeat** in their **ideology of hatred**. That's why they're fighting so vociferously. They showed up in Afghanistan when they were there because they tried to **beat** us, and they didn't. And they're showing up in Iraq for the same reason. They're trying to **defeat** us. And if we **lose** our will, we **lose**. But if we remain **strong** and resolute, we will **defeat** this **enemy**. (George W. Bush)

2000 - Adjectives

Positive Bias

	Bush	Gore
clean	3	4
good	3	0
great	2	2
hard	20	16
profound	1	0
proud	2	0
total	31	22

Negative Bias

	Bush	Gore
big	9	10
crucial	0	1
famous	1	0
powerful	0	5
total	10	16

2004 - Adjectives

Positive Bias

	Bush	Kerry
brave	4	0
free	35	2
fresh	0	4
great	4	4
hard	29	3
modern	2	0
optimistic	6	0
phenomenal	1	0
proud	0	5
safe	12	20
secure	7	3
strong	15	24
successful	0	3
vital	4	1
total	119	69

Negative Bias

	Bush	Kerry
dangerous	5	12
long	1	1
naive	2	0
pessimistic	1	0
unpopular	6	0
failed	0	1
total	15	14

2008 - Adjectives

Positive Bias

	McCain	Obama
great and young	1	0
great	7	2
new	7	5
short-term	0	1
young	10	1
brave and young	2	0
total	27	9

Negative Bias

	McCain	Obama
extreme	3	0
failed	2	6
total	5	6

2000 - Nouns

Positive Bias

	Bush	Gore
hero	0	1
treasure	0	3
total	0	4

Negative Bias

	Bush	Gore
bureaucrat	2	1
danger	1	0
dictator	2	3
outrage	0	1
total	5	5

2000 - Verbs

Positive Bias

	Bush	Gore
encourage	4	0
fight	2	22
help	9	11
honor	2	0
protect	1	0
rebuild	9	0
Save, dream, and build	2	0
succeed	1	0
trust	17	3
total	47	36

Negative Bias

	Bush	Gore
scare	3	0
trap	3	2
total	6	2

2004 - Nouns

Positive Bias

	Bush	Kerry
reformer	1	0
success	0	1
transformation	1	0
truth	1	4
victory	2	1
total	5	6

Negative Bias

	Bush	Kerry
Ideology of hate/hatred	3	0
risk	1	0
criminal and terrorist	0	1
friends	0	2
threat	25	10
total	29	13

2004 - Verbs

Positive Bias

	Bush	Kerry
(re)build	4	12
fight	1	27
fix	1	11
protect	22	3
strengthen	2	4
succeed	13	5
win	12	17
grow	12	1
honor	4	0
modernize	1	0
reform	5	1
welcome	2	0
total	79	81

Negative Bias

	Bush	Kerry
defeat	12	0
fail	1	0
retreat	1	0
ruin	1	0
worry	8	1
rush	0	8
total	23	9

2008 - Nouns

Positive Bias

	McCain	Obama
hero	3	1
honor	7	1
reformer	4	0
role model	1	0
victory	4	0
total	19	2

Negative Bias

	McCain	Obama
dictator	0	4
defeat	12	0
dishonor	1	0
terrorist	2	1
total	15	5

2008 - Verbs

Positive Bias

	McCain	Obama
be proud of	8	1
fight	26	6
fix	18	6
honor	4	2
succeed	11	0
win	7	0
total	74	15

Negative Bias

	McCain	Obama
fail	2	0
fine	11	2
total	13	2

Conclusion

- Hidden bias used most in 2004
- Positive hidden bias more common than negative hidden bias
- Republican candidates use more biased expressions than Democratic candidates
- Different strategy: Republicans use more expressions, Democrats tend to repeat the same expressions more times

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